



MEAT IMPORTERS COUNCIL OF AMERICA, INC.

1901 NORTH FORT MEYER DRIVE • ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA 22209
(703) 522-1910 • FAX (703) 524-6039 • E-mail: micausa@aol.com

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Country of Origin Labeling Program,
Agricultural Marketing Service,
USDA
STOP 0249, Room 2092-S,
1400 Independence Avenue, SW.
Washington, DC 20250-0249

Attention: Docket Clerk

Re: Request for Comments on Country of Origin Regulations – New Information Collection

This submission is provided on behalf of the Meat Importers Council of America, Inc. ("MICA") pursuant to the soliciting of comments on the Notice of Request for Emergency Approval of a New Information Collection ``Interim Voluntary Country of Origin Labeling of Beef, Lamb, Pork, Fish, Perishable Agricultural Commodities, and Peanuts Under the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946." published in the Federal Register on November 21, 2002, Volume 67, Number 225 Page 70205, Docket Number LS-02-16.

MICA is an incorporated trade association, which represents the U.S. industry that imports fresh, chilled and frozen beef into the United States. MICA's regular members are importers who account for most of the non-NAFTA imports of this product. MICA's membership also includes organizations such as port authorities, refrigerated warehouses, customhouse brokers, etc. who provide services in connection with this imported product, as well as users of the same.

MICA is opposed to mandatory country of origin labeling, the motivation of which is clearly to restrict trade in imported products by discouraging use by processors and retailers through the resulting increase in the costs that will be associated with compliance.

A mandatory scheme cannot be implemented without also requiring an animal identification and trace back system, in the United States, for all imported and domestic meat and cattle alike. It is a moot point that a specific animal identification and trace back scheme has not

been mandated. All this means is that, theoretically, different schemes can be employed throughout the industry. In other words while the specific scheme is not mandated by the regulation “a scheme” is effectively mandated as it would be impossible to comply without one. Consequently, record keeping is necessary for the proper operation of this a program and will be required for all cattle a meat, both domestic and imported.

It would not be sufficient to only require identification and trace back of imported meat and animals. If domestic animals are not clearly and specifically identified from birth as being of United States origin then it would be easy to remove any identification associated with imported cattle and simply advise that they were born and raised in the United States.

In the event that the regulation imposed discriminatory labeling requirements on imported meat and cattle it is unlikely that it would survive a WTO challenge. The regulation would clearly discriminate against imported cattle and beef because cattle imports for feeding and/or slaughter would be discouraged by the increased complexity associated with the identification, segregation, and labeling requirements.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.

Sincerely yours,

Laurie Bryant
Executive Director
Meat Importers Council of America, Inc.